BOOK REVIEWS

The Politics of Racial Identity: A Pedagogy of Invisibility

Blacked Out: Dilemmas of Race, Identity, and Success at Capital High. Signithia Fordham. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 412 pp., $65.00, $22.95 (paperback). ISBN No. 0-226-25713-4, 0-226-25714-2 (paperback).

Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth. Stacey J. Lee. New York: Teachers College Press, 1996. 160 pp., $39.00, $17.95 (paperback). ISBN No. 0-807-73510-8, 0-807-73509-4 (paperback).

Latinos and Education: A Critical Reader. Antonia Darder, Rodolfo D. Torres, and Henry Gutierrez (Eds.). New York: Routledge, 1997. 488 pp., $74.95, $22.95 (paperback). ISBN No. 0-415-91181-8, 0-415-91182-6 (paperback).

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The rhetoric of equal educational opportunity often masks the pervasive economic, political, and social control inherent in the cultural and ideological practices of schooling. While this power has been significantly challenged by many historically excluded voices over the past three decades, the dominant mode of education continues to camouflage its promotion of hegemonic ideology while insidiously undermining the diverse ideologies of Others (Bernstein, 1990; Bourdieu, 1986; Freire, 1985; Giroux, 1992; Macedo, 1994; McLaren, 1994; Spina, 1997). Although these discussions are important, they all too frequently lead to the vagaries of identity politics, diverting attention from the more fundamental issue of the power of Whiteness as the dominant principle of social organization and racial ideology in the United States.

Recently, three books have been published that attempt to uncover and develop an understanding of the plurality of ideologies that exist among Black, Asian, and Latino students and their complex relationship with school and community, family and society, self and Other. All of the books challenge, with varying degrees of success, the oppressive and suppressive nature of schooling and the traditional "wisdom" that assimilation via academic achievement is a desirable consequence of public education. They expose the subtle forms of social indoctrination into the tacit dictates of racism that have been historically constructed and promoted, in part, through public education. *Blacked Out: Dilemmas of Race, Identity, and Success at Capital High,* by Signithia Fordham; *Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth,* by Stacey J. Lee; and *Latinos and Education: A Critical Reader,* edited by Antonia Darder, Rodolfo D. Torres, and Henry Gutierrez all take a stand against the rhetoric of dominant racial ideology. It is our hope that juxtaposing these three texts will bring each into sharper focus, resulting in a more critical picture of some of the more salient and subtle aspects of race and identity addressed by these authors.

We begin by clarifying our working definition of dominant racial ideology. Clearly, the dominant racial group in terms of political and economic power in the United States is White. Ideology refers to a system of beliefs that we have as individuals and share with others in our social groups. Ideology surfaces when people vocalize their assumptions. For example, "at-risk youth" is a term synonymous with Black or Latino youth. Likewise, Asian students are depicted as "academic superstars" (Lee, 1996, p. 52). These assumptions reflect how Blacks, Latinos, and Asians are defined by race, although the underlying assumptions apply equally well to gender, class, sexual orientation, English proficiency, and a host of other categorizations. Power lies not in making generalizations, but in making generalizations stick. The dominant White racial ideology supports and maintains these generalizations about Blacks, Latinos, and Asians. But its power does not stop at simply defining Others. Dominant White racial ideology also maintains a normative stance. It supports the assumptions that White youth are not all "at-risk" nor are they all "academic superstars." This position grants White youth the privilege to determine their own academic destiny. (Again, a similar argument may be made with respect to gender, class, etc.) Whiteness remains the dominant racial ideology, not by promoting Whiteness as superior, but by promoting Whiteness as normative. It is from this standpoint that we approach the work of Fordham, Lee, and Darder et al.

Blocking Out Race

Signithia Fordham's *Blacked Out: Dilemmas of Race, Identity, and Success at Capital High* paints a rich ethnographic portrait of Black students and their teachers, families, and community in a predominantly Black high school in Washington, DC. She explores the complexity of Blacks' experiences and understanding of race and success in a sociocultural framework

that includes a history of resistance and a focus on community that clash with the values sanctioned by schools. The ambivalence and conflict resulting from this cultural disparity forces Black adolescents to choose between the ethos of the school and the dominant society and that of their community. One coping strategy some of these teens use is reducing their Black identity to the "purely symbolic":

> For high achieving African-American adolescents at Capital High, *Warfare* [Fordham's italics] is the appropriate term for academic achievement because they are resisting two competing yet similarly debilitating forces: the dominant society's minimal academic expectations for Black students and their classmates' internal policing for group solidarity. (Fordham, 1996, pp. 235–236)

High achievers, having internalized the dominant ideology, focus on academic achievement as a primary way to achieve economic success, while underachievers focus on academic achievement as a primary route to becoming the Other and liquidating the Black self. The uncritical promulgation of education as a vehicle for social and economic success often obscures both the problems and solutions. The cost of success is conflict, confusion, denial, and uncertainty. The politics of assimilation is often a painful process of self-annihilation. The attempts of the families in Fordham's study to rationalize that annihilation within the logic that created and sustains it ironically serve as illustrations of the very conflicts and contradictions they cultivate. Fordham seeks to show the connections between academic achievement of Black students and family culturalization patterns, teacher values and expectations, and gender, religious, and racial identification. In the process, she provides (inadvertently) poignant examples of the willful denial of the role of race and race consciousness in the Black community.

Sade is an "underachiever" who lives with her (biological) mother and father. In the words of Sade's father, "No, I really never considered talking about racism with my child. It really never crossed my mind. I never thought about it before" (Fordham, 1996, p. 142).

Sakay's parents divorced when she was in elementary school. Sakay is also an "underachiever." The youngest of three children, she lives with her mother and siblings but spends weekends with her father. All have remained on good terms. Sakay's mother said the following, talking about herself:

> I don't see race as an issue. I know it's an issue, I just don't *see* it as an issue. I think that whatever I do, I do because I am me, and not because I'm Black. If I excel, it's because I want to excel and not because I'm excelling for a race. I just—I'm not into the Black-White issue. I've never been in—maybe I should be, but I'm not. . . . Be proud of who you are and that's about it. I—I can't think of anybody in my family who is racially motivated. (Fordham, 1996, p. 142)

And about Sakay's father, a police officer:

> In fact, it was more true for him because—well (sigh), why I don't know. He came from—he came from a background—oh, I guess you'd say servitude. His family always worked for Whites—rich ones. But they always had everything they wanted. And I think my former husband sees the race issue as being foolish, because it has never been an issue for him. That's never been an issue for him. He's lived around Blacks, and he's lived around Whites, and he was accepted by both, and he had no problem with any of it. So with him race is something out in left field, and it's . . . Anybody who is saying anything about the racial issue is probably some Black who doesn't want to excel, and he doesn't want to do anything. That's probably the way Sakay's father sees it. And with him being a cop, he sees a lot of it, more so—he sees the destitute Black, or the criminal Black. So the race issue is nothing for him . . . Bless his heart! (Fordham, 1996, p. 143)

Not seeing race is predicated on not seeing White as a race and in denying Whiteness as a focus of critique and analysis. Ignoring the racial construction of Whiteness reinscribes its centrality and reinforces its privileged and oppressive position as normative. Thus, Whiteness becomes a nonrace, invisible to those that would seek to analyze race and racism, thereby giving it more power, more privilege, and more impunity. The nonracialization of Whiteness restricts the ability of minorities to point out racism and gives the dominant White culture more freedom from criticism in the practice of racism. bell hooks (1989) wrote that only by deconstructing the dominant ideology of Whiteness can we begin to understand interlocking societal systems of domination—sexism, racism, and classism.

For the students, teachers, and families of Capital High, the invisibility of race is often *not* a choice, but a socially constructed state of personal identity forced on them by the hegemony of the dominant culture. It is so deeply internalized that they are not even aware of its existence or how far they will go to keep it that way.[1] For example, in chapter five, Fordham examines how Black teachers (predominantly women) at Capital High attempt to fulfill their roles as transmitters of "socially approved knowledge and values" to their Black students and their own children. According to Fordham, only one teacher (Ms. Costen) out of the 100 at Capital has enrolled her child in the school. When Ms. Costen distributes a note to teachers that questions the school's celebration of St. Patrick's Day when it does not celebrate the accomplishments of Black heroes, Fordham is "sympathetic" with Ms. Costen's outrage at their hostility toward her, but also "absolutely baffled and appalled by her total misreading of what was and was not even remotely likely to be acceptable to her colleagues" (p. 199). Fordham, it seems, like the other teachers, could not deal with resistance that was not "subtle" and conforming, that did not perpetuate the mythic denial of race. She dances dangerously close to the borders of collusion.

What Fordham does not explore is that by practicing explicit resistance to implicit racism Ms. Costen was perhaps the only teacher who could offer students a real choice, a model of liberatory praxis for connecting education to life and for merging ideology with action for social change (see Freire, 1970). The author perplexingly chooses instead to focus on the teacher's act as an example of her "ineffectiveness" despite her "certified competence." One wonders whether the denial of racial identity would be as strong a factor if one did not have teachers who modeled it almost constantly instead of explicitly deconstructing it. If the teachers at Capital

High had grounded their pedagogy in the students' experience rather than that of the dominant culture, perhaps students would have developed the tools for success without the psychological stressors.

Another problem with Fordham's book (and also a reflection of the larger culture) is that she defines "American" in terms of Whiteness and distinguishes "Blackness" by its contrast to Whiteness. She writes of Black and White as oppositional, reified conceptions of race devoid of complexity and diversity. While establishing binary oppositions is not in and of itself a hazard, consistently defining one in terms of the other without problematizing the oppositionality creates an asymmetry that establishes Whiteness as normative and excludes other groups from the argument. Whiteness becomes stereotypical and monolithic, and Blackness loses its independent identity. This is particularly disconcerting because Fordham recognizes the conflict inherent in such dichotomies and bemoans the resulting ambivalence that forces Black adolescents to "choose" between the ethos of the school and dominant society and the collective ethos of their community. Fordham looks to cultural differences such as family composition and stability, income, parent expectations, teacher styles, dating behaviors, and the like to explain this situation. The implication is that these are variables that can supposedly be manipulated to effect the outcome (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993, p. xvii). This approach suggests interventions to change factors that deviate from the norm of Whiteness, thereby reinforcing its supremacy while pathologizing "Otherness."

Modeling Minorities

In *Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth,* Stacey J. Lee also explores issues of race and identity. In this ethnographic study of a special-admission east coast high school she names "Academic High," Lee attempts to deessentialize the iconic conception of Asian American. Her review of the academic and popular literature is a clear, thoughtful, and well-written synopsis of the "model minority" stereotype. She succeeds in establishing for readers the larger social context faced by Asian Americans.

Lee identifies four groups of Asian American students in the context of Academic High, including the Korean-identified, the Asian-identified, the "new wavers," and the Asian American–identified students. These groupings are central to and provide the substructure for her subsequent analysis. Lee discusses the various interactions among the groups, interweaving her insightful analysis with the voices of the students. However, it is significant that Lee also encountered individuals who would not place themselves within these categorizations. For example, she included the following excerpt of her interview with an Asian female student she thought was a "new waver":

> SL: Are you new wave?
> Lan: No.
> SL: Do other people think you are new wave?
> Lan: Yes, they think I dress so nice and cool, but I don't.
> SL: What are new wave students like?
> Lan: Some is nice, some not. Some, they drink, smoke, and go to party every night. I don't drink or smoke.
>
> As soon as I asked Lan whether she was a new waver, she became very tense and defensive. It was obvious that I offended her. Later in the interview, Lan asserted that she was new wave but "one of the nice one[s]." Apparently, Lan did not want non-new wave people to consider her to be new wave because other Asians had negative images of new wave students. (Lee, 1996, p. 36)

From this excerpt, it appears that Lan was resisting the stereotypical images that were coupled to the term "new wave." This was one example of how a single student attempted to define her identity partly through self-construction and partly through social construction. From interviews and candid discussions, Lee provides the reader with a complex picture of the social structure facing Asian students at Academic High. By detailing the relationships of the four Asian American student groups with academic achievement, Lee shows the reader that the monolithic view of Asian Americans as academic high achievers is oversimplified and sometimes just plain wrong. She sketches vivid portraits of the Asian American students within the racialized environment of Academic High, describing the role of race in school policy as well as in activities such as the school newspaper and the music program. Lee also discusses the racial views of Whites on Asians, Blacks on Asians, and Asians on both Whites and Blacks. She describes the racial attitudes of individuals within the monolithic categories of White, Black, and Asian, holding true to her primary vision of overcoming stereotypes.

The book concludes with Lee's reflections on the Asian "model minority" stereotype regarding identity formation and race. She critically assesses Ogbu's theory on immigrant identity formation, "minority" stereotyping regarding identity formation and race. Contrary to the static view of identity that Ogbu suggests, Lee's data support a more "fluid and flexible" model of identity formation among Asian youth. She discovered that the Asian students she interviewed, especially those grouped as "new wavers," had fluid identities that shifted and changed over time.

In "Issues of Race," a subsection of the last chapter, Lee points out that White students were well represented in both elite courses and elite extracurricular activities. Additionally, they were the largest group of students, making up about 45% of the student body (Lee, 1996, p. 121). For these reasons, Lee concludes:

> Thus white students were secure in their position at the top of the racial hierarchy. As such whites were not threatened by Asian American success, and most held relatively positive attitudes toward Asian Americans. According to some white students and teachers, Asian American students were model minorities who proved that equal opportunity existed for students of all races. (1996, p. 121)

Yet, Lee goes on to say later in this section that working-class White students who were outsiders in the White group feared that their status was threatened by Asians and did not share these positive attitudes. This conclusion precipitated our consideration of the normative power of Whiteness, even when the norm is not representative of all who may be categorized as White. She also reports that Black students were likewise threatened by this stereotype. Though Lee

reports that many of the White students she interviewed revealed a positive attitude toward Asians and supported the "model minority" stereotype, Black students and working-class White students were threatened by this stereotype. The Asian "model minority" stereotype is impressed by the dominant White culture on all Asians, even those not accepting or supporting it. Participation in the "model minority" stereotype is not an option for Asians. The current structure of the stereotype subsumes all Asians with or without the consciousness of individual Asians. Lee spoke eloquently on this point in her earlier review of the literature.

However, Lee fails to discuss one particularly salient aspect of the "model minority" stereotype embedded in the language itself. As Derrida (1981) argued, western language—and therefore western thought—is structured in terms of polarities, and these polarities are not independent and equal. Terminology is implicitly oppositional and inherently hierarchical. For example, "model minority" connotes "quiet, respectful of authority, and hardworking" (Lee, 1996, p. 31). This does more than describe what a particular group is. It also identifies what other groups are not because they are assumed to have the negative of that characteristic. This aspect of the "model minority" stereotype is what Tai (1995) terms "negative reciprocity." By stereotyping a particular group with certain characteristics, other groups are assumed to have the opposite of that characteristic. Suppose a third-grade teacher were to single out one student and say, "Look at Ron. He's working so hard and behaving so well." The connotation is that the other students are not hardworking. The teacher does not have to say that what the others are doing is less desirable. She does not have to say that the others are not hardworking or not well behaved—or even which others are not hardworking or not well behaved. If any other students were as hardworking as Ron, then why should he be singled out? Similarly, the "model minority" stereotype can be used by the dominant White culture to maintain its power while also maintaining its invisibility. By maintaining a "model minority" stereotype, the dominant White culture never needs to explicitly label non–"model minorities" negatively. This negativity is implicit in how the dominant White culture "compliments" the "model minority." Thus the focus of the negative stereotypes stems from the "model minority" and not the dominant White culture. By seemingly complimenting the "model minority," the dominant White culture implicitly denigrates other minorities (including less successful Whites). The dominant White culture maintains the appearance of acting in a positive manner, shifting the focus of anger from the White– denigrated minority groups to the "model minority." While the "model minority" reaps "positive" social images, other minorities reap "negative" social images. Negative reciprocity is an implication of the "model minority" stereotype that serves as a normative tool for the perpetuation of the White racial ideology within U.S. society. Focusing solely on issues of personal identity without deconstructing the stereotypes that dominant White racial ideology forces on groups and individuals is much like building castles in the sand. The tide of the dominant ideology will only wash away the identities we build.[2]

"Not Nowhere"

Like the other two volumes, *Latinos and Education: A Critical Reader* challenges hegemonic notions of racial identity, academic success, and the ideologies underlying the institutionalization of culture, identity, and language. However, *Latinos* is far more successful than the other volumes in moving beyond a language of oppositionality and domination. It is the only volume that offers a critical reconceptualization of education, grounded in the practice of the educators/authors, who offer specific suggestions for transforming the status quo by complexifying public policy debates and democratizing education. Because it is an anthology, unlike the two ethnographies, it is more eclectic and offers a wider scope that places the education of Latinos in not just a local or national but a global context. Antonia Darder, Rodolfo D. Torres, Henry Gutierrez, and the contributing authors cover a broad range of related issues. The book is divided into six sections that foreground specific but critically related themes: "The Political Economy," "Historical Views of Latinos and Schooling," "Constructing Latino/a Identities," "The Politics of Language," "Cultural Democracy in the Classroom," and "The Power of Community Involvement." Contributing authors include Donaldo Macedo, Sonia Nieto, Juan Flores, Gloria Anzaldua, Ana Celia Zentella, Mario Barrera, and Richard Ruiz, among others. They present a diversity of Latino/a voices from Nuyorican to Chicano, city dwellers to farmers, and illuminate the relationship between practice and history, culture, and society. While many of the arguments and reprinted chapters may be familiar to the intended audience, having them together, organized in illuminating, complementary fashion, makes this volume greater than the sum of its parts. The collection is noteworthy for providing the most exacting analysis by a group of leading scholars in the field of Latino/a education.

Just as the invisibility of Whiteness reinforces the stereotypical roles of Asians and Blacks, so, too, the "Americanization" of Latinos serves to keep them subordinated—to solve "the problem." For example, Gonzalo Santos begins "Constructing Latino/a Identities" with a history of ethnicity as a "stratifying medium for the accumulators of capital and as an indispensable element in the ideology of resistance by those who have suffered the exploitation and oppression" (p. 204) and proposes "a new framing ethnic identity" that goes deeper, beyond European ideological roots, an identity that is "not merely reactive" but creates "an affirmative culture of great beauty and vision" (p. 213). Santos argues against the "manufacture" of ethnicities constructed to subordinate, such as the "pre-fabricated panethnicity of the Hispanic" (p. 214). Santos may not call it Whiteness, but it is certainly not invisible to him.

Juan Flores and George Yudice take a similarly critical stance enhanced by the authors' effective use of the words of contemporary Latino artists and writers to illustrate and inform their arguments. Their contribution, "Living Borders/Buscando America: Languages of Latino Self-Formation," addresses dimensions unique to Latinos as multi-ethnic, multiracial peoples, but that are germane to other minority groups as well. Their description of Latino affirmation to "fend off" the "schizophrenia" resulting from the "pathological duality born of contend-

ing cultural worlds and, perhaps more significantly, of the conflicting pressures toward both exclusion and forced incorporation" (p. 177) echoes Fordham's "successful" students' attempts to render their skin color—their Blackness—meaningless. However, this "namelessness," as Flores and Yudice call it, is *not* an option for Latino/as. Such a situation is, in Latino culture, "not nowhere" (p. 177). It is "part of an ethos which seeks to be politicized as a means to validation and self-determination" (p. 177). The struggle, as Flores frames it, is not to define an alternative to resistance, but to practice an alternative form of resistance, interfacing with the dynamics of political and cultural struggle—a form of resistance that turns culture back on itself, rooted in "the cultural ethos of everyday" life and standing "in blatant contrast to the fabricated, apologetic implications of 'mainstream' in its conventional usage" (pp. 180–181). To underscore how the dominant society disguises its perpetuation of the legacy of colonialism, Flores points to the success of *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez.* Rodriguez exemplifies the "hybrid model minority." His autobiographical affirmation of his assimilation into the gringo middle class, replete with the conservative rhetoric of the Reagan era, made him the "Hispanic" representative of choice in the halls of government and academia. "Blending in" is rewarded. Difference is discouraged. Disagreement is derogated. Such biases, however, are not just interracial.

The authors of *Latinos and Education* boldly address issues of intra- as well as interracial prejudices including ethnic and linguistic biases. Gloria Anzaldua's chapter vigorously deconstructs stereotypical identity. She breaks through forced categorization by detailing and humanizing her existence. "Movimientos de Rebelda y las Culturas que Traicionan" begins with an account of the author's cultural experiences in juggling her multiple personas as Chicana, woman, Catholic, and lesbian. Anzaldua explores her culture autobiographically and argues against its machismo bias—how it "caricatures men" and "cripples women." It is a powerful piece—alternating between Spanish and English, description and poetry, pride and outrage—that, as Renato Rosaldo says, celebrates "the potential of borders in opening up new forms of understanding" (Flores, 1993, p. 223).

Latinos, as a whole, does more than open new forms of understanding. It creates new forms of life (Wittgenstein, 1965). It moves beyond the normative power of White ideology that defines other cultures in terms of Whiteness. The authors complexify "Latino-ness" as independent of the normative force of White ideology without ignoring the oppositionality of Whiteness versus Otherness. They position Latino/a cultures and identity as autonomous of Whiteness, not parasitic on it.

A caveat is in order here. We should not lose sight of the fact that White is also a prefabricated panethnicity, although structured to dominate, and that only by exposing it as such can we hope to engage with its implications. Just as the label "Hispanic" glosses over, dilutes, and suppresses the much stronger national ethnicities of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans, for example, obscuring the historic roots of their condition as oppressed people and conflating the cultural diversity of these groups into an "amorphous mass," so, too, the label "White" robs individuals of this other "amorphous mass" of their claims to diverse European cultural heritages.

Concluding Comments

We approached these books with a great deal of hope and enthusiasm. In general, our expectations were unevenly met. The issues raised by these authors are as controversial and potentially polarizing as any important ideas in the history of education. For minorities to break free from stereotypic dehumanization, one step is to deconstruct the status quo. The three volumes reviewed here deconstruct the implicit Whiteness of our society and expose the realities of inequity that sustain marginalization, albeit to varying levels of success. There are some disappointments, but the criticisms, however, do not diminish the significance of the texts. Instead of arguing for a return to "basics" or more or different testing, these authors place the focus of the educational crises where it belongs—on the forces that produce it.

Through compelling stories of continuing struggles, these authors raise questions that are much deeper and far more basic than academic success. Reading them, one cannot help feeling anger and frustration, but also hope and power. They challenge prevailing pedagogical models and definitions of success centered on White dominant cultural "norms" by underscoring the political nature of schooling and the racialization of identity as reflections of larger cultural contexts, a realization that is crucial to overcoming the current craze of cultural distortionists who seek to perpetuate their power by wrapping it in the flag of a mythical "democracy" where equality, liberty, and justice are not for all.

Notes

[1] For a discussion of this phenomena, see D. Macedo. (1996). Literacy for stupidification: The pedagogy of big lies. In P. Leistyna, A. Woodrum, & S. Sherblom (Eds.), *Breaking free: The transformative power of critical pedagogy* (pp. 31–57). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review Reprint Series 27.

[2] An important distinction must be made between the wholesale stereotyping of people and a microscale stereotyping of individuals. For example, Clarence Thomas has been held up as a role model by the dominant White culture. His evident conformity and acceptance of the dominant culture and its spoken and unspoken dicta guarantees that his is one of many "minority" voices that will have an audience. Because of the "non-threatening" and supportive nature of these "minority" voices for the hegemonic stereotypes, the dominant group serves as both author of and audience for their position. This minority group with "dominant cultural voices" forms a "hybrid model minority," which is different from the "model minority" status of Asians. Membership in the hybrid model minority is determined through the White patronage system, which admits those who support their legitimizing power. Is it any wonder that some students choose to "act white" when the normative "role models" from their own race—those sanctioned by the dominant ideology—have far more in common with the hegemonic culture than their own?

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